THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) At present, tea attracts basic customs duty of 15% as well as a surcharge of 10% of basic duty (total of 16.5%). It is also chargeable to additional duty of Rs. 2 per kg. During the year 1996-97, 1.25 million kgs. of tea was imported. For the years 1997-98 and 1998-99, the imports are estimated to be of the order of 2.61 million kgs. and 8.39 million kgs. respectively.

(c) In view of the ensuing budget, it is not possible to indicate the opinion of the Government, at this stage.

Excise duties on tobacco and pan masala

549. SHRI SHIBU SOREN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have completely waived off excise duties on the tobacco and pan masala units in the North Eastern India;

(b) if so, details of the States in which these items are exempted from excise duties; and

(c) the names and details of the companies which are likely to be benefited by this decision of the Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR): (a) and (b) Units manufacturing tobacco or pan masala located in specific growth centres, industrial parts, industrial estates etc. in the State of Assam and Tripura are exempt from basic and additional excise duty paid by them in cash. The exemption is available only to units that have been set up after 24th December, 1997 or have undertaken substantial expansion after that date.

(c) At present, the benefit of this exemption is being claimed by M/s. New Zone India Ltd., Tezpur,, M/s. NTC Ltd., Badarpur, M/s. NETCO Ltd., Amingaon, M/s. Dharampal Satyapal Ltd.,

Agartala and M/s. Dharampal Premchand Ltd., Agartala. However, any unit that satisfies the conditions prescribed in the exemption notification is eligible for its benefit.

Evasion of excise duty by beedi manufacturers

550. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are losing Rs. 1 crore per day on Central excise duty on beedi as manufacturers are evading by fictitious figures;

(b) whether production in unrecognised sector is never shown and sold in local market; and

(c) if so, the steps proposed to increase revenue on beedis by contacting trade unions in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and shall be laid on the Table of the House.

Review of the Constitution to ensure stability

551. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the proposed review of the Indian Constitution is intended to ensure stability at the Centre and in the States to complete their respective full terms;

(b) whether such an argument was pleased by the Prime Minister during celebrations of 50th anniversary of the Indian Republic; and

(c) if so, what were the circumstances that led to hold elections for State Assembly of Haryana fifteen months ahead of due date?

THE MINISTER OF LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI RAM JETHMALANI): (a) and (b) During the course of his address at the function to mark the Golden Jubilee of